

TOPICS OF THE DAY.

WHAT'S ALL THE SHOOTIN' FOR?

MANY of our contemporaries, of both the liberal and conservative persuasions, seem to be very much wrought up just now about a secret society known as the Ku Klux Klan, which is said to be undermining all the liberties so notoriously enjoyed by our free citizenry. Now, if there is one thing that this paper is more concerned about than another it is liberty, and we just hate to appear lukewarm in so excellent a cause. Yet, even at the risk of being misunderstood, we are tempted, like Rosa Dartle, to ask a few questions of our contemporaries who are so noisily protesting against the activities of the Imperial Wizard and his white-robed Knights. It is unnecessary to share all the dark suspicions of the author of "The Brass Check" in order to have arrived at a becoming degree of equanimity when newspapers suddenly embark with sound and fury upon a crusade for Freedom. It was that superman amongst editorial writers, the late Lord Macaulay, who once remarked that there was nothing more ridiculous than the English people in one of its periodical fits of morality. If he had lived a little longer he might have discovered a rival entertainment when the commercialized press of this country is seized with one of its periodical fits of anxiety for the Liberty of the common people.

As far as the facts go in the indictment of the Ku Klux Klan, all that has been ascertained up to date is that it is a secret organization, that it has an elaborate and preposterous ritual, that its members are banded together for purposes of their own, and that whenever it has the power to do so, it takes the law into its own hands, to the disadvantage of its victims. One newspaper has summed up the case against the society by setting forth "152 valid objections to the revival of the Ku Kluxing spirit," as follows:

Killings	4
Irreparable mutilation	1
Branding with acid	1
Floggings	41
Tar-and-feather parties	27
Kidnappings	5
Individuals warned to leave town or otherwise threatened ..	43
Communities threatened by posters or advertisements	14
Parades of masked Klansmen displaying warning placards ..	16
Total	152

Far be it from us to deny that these are, indeed, highly reprehensible practices, but do they not recall exactly the methods which are not disdained by many of our most honoured citizens? In fact, at first sight, the foregoing table reads like a certificate of what passes in highly respectable quarters for a hundred-percent Americanism. The Klansmen may have allowed their enthusiasm to lead them into an over-zealous emulation of their betters—for these figures are the record of just one year in the life of the Klan—but who will pretend that they have not obviously allowed their choice of methods to be determined solely by the example of their superiors in the art of intimidation?

If we were as statistically-minded as some of our liberal friends, we could doubtless find figures which would show the corresponding achievements of the innumerable other corporate bodies of this type in America. The "Invisible Empire" of Mr. William Joseph Simmons has surely fewer deaths on its conscience than most empires. It has not so many killings to its credit as have our lynching-parties. Its exploits with tar and feathers must be run pretty close by several of our

loyal and patriotic associations for the extermination of political and social heresy. Shall a Kleagle furnished by his Wizard with a commission to fight for "Law and Order, Peace and Justice," shrink from sacrifices (of other people) which are regularly made by the recognized champions of more sordid interests? With Messrs. Lusk and Burleson and Palmer, with the American Legion and the gladiators of Baldwin-Felts all marching on before, why should a diminutive Kleagle hesitate at a little lawlessness in the good cause of things as they are? Even the famous Kloran has a flattering flavour of the style and content of the official scriptures which emanate from Washington, D. C. Since imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, it seems strange that one particular piece of mountebankery should excite the wrath of the hundred-per-cent Americans, whose standard theories and practices are so faithfully reflected in the programme of the Klan.

It has been shown that the Ku Klux Klan has a definite bias against Catholics, Jews, and Negroes; that these three large classes of American citizens have the misfortune of being excluded from membership; and that the propaganda of the society is mainly directed against them. Again one is tempted to inquire: why all this fury of indignation over one particular manifestation of what seems to us to be a very prevalent spirit of racial and religious bigotry? As a matter of fact, the newspapers which have displayed the greatest concern about the intolerance of the Klan have never shown the slightest practical interest in the principles which are at issue in this case. The head of the British Empire, as everybody knows, can never be a Catholic, although the most ignorant Methodist could not be rejected for theological reasons. Yet, none of the critics of the militant Protestantism of the "Invisible Empire" has been associated, as far as our knowledge goes, with any protest against the same prejudice in other places, not excluding this country, where opposition to a Catholic president is by no means confined to Kleagles.

It was somewhat earlier than the reign of the present Imperial Wizard that this country developed the Ku Klux attitude towards our coloured fellow-citizens, and anti-Semitism has flourished in every quarter without arousing very passionate protests on the part of those who are not affected by it. Apparently it is only reprehensible when practised under the ægis of a gentleman dressed up in a white sheet. If Jews can be openly barred from our fashionable clubs and hotels and exclusive suburbs, why not from the noble Order of the Klan? Surely the sacred principle of personal liberty, so jealously honoured by the press, is here at stake? If Mr. (or is it Colonel?) William Joseph Simmons is not free to decide what sort of people are to be admitted into his organization, what becomes of the right of our captains of industry to "run their own business in their own way," to the greater glory of the low wage and the open shop? The trustees of our universities are likely to be the next victims of this insensate campaign for freedom. Some reckless editor will be insisting that they shall not dismiss their professors merely because they do not agree with them.

Thus it is plain to see that this inconsiderate attack upon the methods and ideals of the Ku Klux Klan is pregnant with danger to all the institutions and practices of the established order. The Klan is such a perfect microcosm of modern political democracy that to criticize it is as disastrous, from the conservative point of view, as to invoke the principle of self-determination when one is waging war for export-markets and steel. Look at the trouble Europe has got into, owing to the well-meaning efforts of idealists like Sir Harry Lauder,

Sir Gilbert Parker, and Lord Beaverbrook! If these altruists had only refrained from talking so much about the rights of small nations, how much simpler would be the present tasks of the Allied Governments. In Ireland, for example, Mr. Lloyd George might have continued indefinitely the traditional policy of supporting the Loyal Orange Order, whose programme of Ku Kluxism so naturally appeals to the statesmen of a well-regulated plutocracy.

The opponents of the Ku Klux Klan in this country may be forgiven, for they know not what they do. But there are a few facts which ought to be established before this campaign goes too far. It must be remembered that these fraternal and secret organizations are at the very base of contemporary society. The signs, passwords, handshakes, titles, costumes and mummery of the Klan are an integral part of the whole monstrous buffoonery of the present social order. Mr. H. L. Mencken, whose researches into the lore of these institutions are profound, has diagnosed lodge-joining as one of the outstanding characteristics of the average American, and the multiplicity of the innumerable confraternities and their imbecile pretensions, as a fundamental element in American civilization. Is it possible that the Klan is to be destroyed as the first step in purging our social system of these pitiable substitutes for rational and natural associations of congenial individuals? The phenomenon itself is of slight account, unless the impulse behind it be diagnosed and frankly faced. Some Poor White in Georgia can hardly be blamed for devising his own form of co-operative effort and fraternal association, and embodying in its aims the very things which are preached with impunity and practised all over the world by persons whom he has been taught to respect. From the proudest Freemason, down to the most youthful university graduate who belongs to a fraternity, this delight in secret orders, childish titles and the sense of irresponsible power proceeding from anonymous mob-action, is given free play, with the full approval of public opinion. Granted that, in many cases, imbecility is the worst charge which can be brought against them, there are many others where inquiry would elicit more useful facts than anything related of the eminent Mr. Simmons and his Kleagles and Kleaglets.

It is unlikely that our courageous press will pursue its investigations so far as to tell us what part the Grand Orient of France plays in the making of international policies for which the uninitiated eventually pay with lives and money. It will spare us the details, horrible or ridiculous, of the initiation of kings, and princes and such potentates, into the various orders of chivalry, Masonry and so forth, from which all our tinpot American varieties derive. The revelations about the Ku Klux Klan have told us nothing, except that what Mr. Mencken calls the "booboisie" is obviously a docile imitator of the boobocracy.

THE INTERNATIONAL SHELL GAME.

As the time rolls around for the meeting of Mr. Harding's parliament of premiers and near-premiers, we are moved to say once more that we are about as much interested in an agreement for the limitation of armaments, as we should be in a compact between highwaymen which would bind each of the contracting parties to carry only one gun, instead of two or three. It seems to us that in either case the agreement is likely to be of little effect, as long as the governments and the bandits remain in their old line of business; and it is for this very reason that we are deeply interested in the

limitation, not of armaments, but of imperialism—which is, of course, another story.

Not many days ago, a certain guileless journalist exposed the folly of Mr. Harding's conference by asking how it is possible for the United States to submit to anything approaching disarmament, and at the same time to safeguard her outlying possessions, and to maintain the Monroe Doctrine in full glory. We have given the question some little thought, and our best answer is that it is quite impossible—just as impossible as the maintenance of British rule in India, or French rule in Algeria, would be under similar circumstances.

The spheres and possessions of the Great Powers are subject to two sorts of attack, from without and from within; and accordingly the Powers have armed themselves against each other, and against the subject peoples. Spheres and possessions overseas serve likewise two major purposes; they provide the manufacturers of the home-country with raw materials and markets, and they offer to capitalists many lucrative opportunities for investment.

International competition for exclusive markets and exclusive sources of materials led to wars a-plenty in the hey-day of mercantilism, and is still responsible for no little activity of a military sort. Every once in a while the notion gets about that this kind of competition does not pay; and then people begin to talk hopefully of some scheme for co-operative exploitation, which will remove the danger of external attack upon the spheres and possessions of the Powers.

The League of Nations might have accomplished some such scheme as this if it had accomplished anything at all; and yet in so doing it would not have eliminated a condition which makes it increasingly necessary for imperialism to go armed. This necessity arises from the increasing rebelliousness of the "backward" peoples, and the increasing effectiveness of their opposition to imperialism; and this, in turn, may be traced directly to the second phase of imperial activity, the exportation of capital.

This activity has been accompanied by a growth in the bitterness of rivalry between the Powers, but even if the Government and the international corporations had lived up to the letter and the spirit of the mandatory system, and had extended it to every private sphere already under their control, the most important results of the exportation of capital would still remain substantially unchanged. In effect, the overseas investors are exporting the industrial revolution. They are systematically erecting the dependencies into economic competitors of the home countries, and are arousing among the "backward" peoples a combination of class-feeling against foreign investors, and national feeling against foreign Governments.

One does not have to go beyond the limits of our own continent for proof that a primitive people who have been stirred up by the sudden transplanting of new industrial methods are particularly likely to attack privileges held by foreign monopolists. The new imperialists can sometimes get along quite well without taking political control of the country in which they operate; occasionally they can even settle down peaceably with imperialists who fly another flag than their own; but under no condition can they or any of them, tolerate the alteration of the economic system which serves them all alike. It is this system that makes imperial armaments necessary, however much the imperial Governments may draw together in fellowship; this system that makes the whole world kin, and enables the exploiter to live upon his numerous relatives.